

IMPROVEMENT OF THE MOUTH OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

IN RELATION TO

The improvement of the mouth of the Mississippi River.

JUNE 19, 1874.—Referred to the Committee on Commerce and ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT, *May 20, 1874.*

The Secretary of War has the honor to transmit to the House of Representatives, for the information of the Committee on Commerce, copy of report of operations for the month of April, 1874, at mouth of the Mississippi River, made by Capt. C. W. Howell, Corps of Engineers, and letter of the Chief of Engineers submitting the same.

WM. W. BELKNAP.

Secretary of War.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF ENGINEERS,

Washington, D. C., May 14, 1874.

SIR: The inclosed copy of the report of operations for the month of April, 1874, at the work of improving the mouth of the Mississippi River, submitted by Capt. C. W. Howell, Corps of Engineers, on the 2d instant, is respectfully submitted for consideration.

In view of the obstructions to the navigation of the passes at the mouth of Mississippi, caused by the grounding of vessels upon the bar, reported by Captain Howell, it is respectfully suggested that a copy of his report be transmitted to the Committee on Commerce of the House of Representatives for its information. It is understood that the subject is now under consideration by that committee.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

A. A. HUMPHREYS,

Brigadier-General and Chief of Engineers.

Hon. W. W. BELKNAP,

Secretary of War.

UNITED STATES ENGINEER OFFICE,
New Orleans, La., May 2, 1874.

GENERAL: I have the honor to submit the following report of operations at Pass à Loutre during the month of April, 1874:

My report for March closed with the steamer Jamaican blocking the channel at Pass à Loutre, with Southwest Pass blocked by the steamer Vandalia, and with a large number of vessels waiting to go to sea.

Before the Jamaican could be put to sea the steamers Vixen and Saint Louis were placed on the bar. No dredging could be done, and in the attempts to clear the channel the rudder of the Essayons was broken and lost, the deflector broken so as to be unserviceable, and material damage done to the upper works of the vessel.

April 2 the Jamaican was put to sea. On the 7th the Vixen and Saint Louis were gotten off, clearing the bar.

Between the 7th and 23d all the vessels blockaded were successfully crossed without material detention, although a number of them were drawing over eighteen feet.

The accompanying list gives their names and draughts, when ascertained, also the depth of channel at extreme low tide, and the rise of high tide above our datum plane.

During this time the Essayons, in her crippled condition, was kept at work, dredging with her screw alone, when practicable, and working on vessels grounded.

On the 23d the condition of the channel was reported as follows: "There is 19 to 20 feet at low tide down below Can 4, and there is a narrow channel of 18 down nearly to Twin Cans. But there is a short distance of $15\frac{1}{2}$ there not over 600 feet." (See chart of July 19 1873, for location of cans.)

On the 23d the steamer Memphis, drawing 17 feet 6 inches forward and 18 feet 2 inches aft, escorted by four tow-boats, and in charge of a pilot, attempted a crossing and was grounded, blockading the channel to this date. At the time of her grounding the shoalest part of the channel was $18\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep, and the grounding was effected where it was about 21 feet deep. The pilot blames the tow-boats. The tow-boats blame the pilot. The captain of the steamer has nothing to say.

It is difficult to get at the truth. The *effect* pleases the Tow-boat Association. It is hard to understand why on the 22d the ship Ajax, with two tow-boats, should pass out without trouble, and on the 23d with a deeper channel a steamer but two inches greater draught, with her own power and four tow-boats, should fail.

In default of other explanation I accept this: *The grounding was intentional.*

The Tow-boat Association, under the pressure of a blockaded commerce, was forced to yield and take ships detained through Pass à Loutre.

It was necessary to discover that Pass à Loutre "had suddenly cut out."

The discovery was made, published, and the blockade relieved, as it could have been done a month before, and the pressure removed.

This done it was safe to again resort to the old trick of blocking the pass at which the dredge was working, but with this variation: The blockade must be effected with steamers, for then it would not be so evidently the fault of the tow-boats. The steamers selected must be induced to take an extravagant number of tow-boats, to the better indi-

cate the bad condition of the channel and to afford better facilities for grounding in the most suitable place.

It was also considered well to ask *my permission* to employ tow-boats on steamers, as if I had control in the matter; and to bruit it about the streets of New Orleans that they would not give steamers, until after grounding, the services of their boats without such permission.

I believe I thoroughly understand the every act and motive of this association affecting the work with which I am charged. I have watched its workings closely. I have seen it defeat my best efforts, whether with or without intention it is difficult to prove.

The way that offered proof has been closed against me by the withdrawal of the libel suit brought by the association, I can only continue to make my official assertions as to the necessity of giving the Secretary of War the power to protect the Government work from its depredations.

I cannot spare time to elaborate these assertions and fully explain all my grounds for making them.

That prejudice has made these assertions stronger than warrantable I do not believe, though it may be considered possible.

I again urge that Congress, before making further appropriation, take suitable action for protecting the results of appropriation.

The completion of repairs to McAlester has been delayed by rejection of bad work on them. It is thought she will be ready in a few days.

Surveys during April were made at South Pass, but under very unfavorable circumstances, peculiar to this season of the year.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

C. W. HOWELL,

Captain of Engineers, United States Army.

Brigadier-General A. A. HUMPHREYS,

Chief of Engineers, United States Army, Washington, D. C.

4 IMPROVEMENT OF THE MOUTH OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER.

Pass à Loutre, from April 7 to April 23.

PASSED IN.			PASSED OUT.				
Date.	Name of vessel.	Draught.	Date.	Depth of channel at extreme low tide.	Tide above extreme low.	Name of vessel.	Draught.
		<i>Ft. in.</i>		<i>Feet.</i>	<i>Feet.</i>		<i>Ft. in.</i>
10th..	Brig N. Husted		7th..			Steamer Saint Louis	
11th..	Steamer Knickerbocker		7th..			Steamer Vixen	
12th..	Steamer Germania	16 6	7th..			Ship California	
13th..	Steamer Yazoo	18	8th..	16	2	Steamer State of Louisiana	
13th..	Steamer Texas	17	8th..			Ship Armstrong	
13th..	Brig Oliver	12	8th..			Ship Carl Adler	
14th..	Steamer W. P. Clyde		8th..			Ship Jupiter	
14th..	Bark Maria Auger		8th..			Ship Fylgia	
15th..	Bark Adgar		8th..			Bark Energie	
15th..	Bark Lincoln		9th..			Bark Maria	
15th..	Brig Chare, Buck		9th..			Bark New York	
16th..	Brig Aurora		9th..			Bark Ginnivere	
17th..	Ship Invincible		10th..			Ship Ceferina	
			10th..			Ship Proteus	
			10th..			Brig Esperanza	
			10th..			Steamer Vicksburg	18 6
			10th..			Steamer J. G. Whipple	
			10th..			Steamer Margaret	
			11th..			Steamer George Washington	
			11th..			Ship India	
			11th..			Ship Pocahontas	
			11th..			Bark Jane	
			11th..			Bark Rome	
			12th..			Ship Gold Hunter	17 2
			12th..			Bark Bravo	
			12th..			Bark Malpo	
			12th..			Two barks, (unknown)	
			12th..			One schooner	
			13th..	15½	2½	Ship Belgravia	18 6
			13th..			Ship Expounder	
			13th..			Brig Wenonah	11 0
			14th..			Ship Carl	18 10
			14th..			Bark Racer	
			14th..			One bark, (unknown)	
			15th..			Bark Strathem	18 6
			15th..			Bark Ryerson	17 3
			15th..			Bark Polen	
			16th..			Bark Juno	
			17th..			Ship Victory	
			17th..			Ship Advice	18 6
			17th..			Steamer Federico	18 6
			17th..			Steamer Lavacca	
			17th..			Bark Carmine	
			18th..	15½	2½	Steamer William P. Clyde	
			18th..			Ship Queen of the Mersey	18 0
			18th..			Ship Hypatia	
			18th..			Bark C. Hickman	
			19th..			Steamer Knickerbocker	
			19th..			Bark Ole Mollow	
			20th..			Ship Bombay	16 6
			20th..			Ship Marcia C. Day	17 0
			20th..			Bark Pomona	
			20th..			Schooner Lily of the Valley	
			20th..			Schooner Thomas Winam	
			20th..			Schooner Helen A. Locke	
			21st..			Bark Noab	
			21st..			Bark Selley	
			21st..			Bark Magenta	
			21st..			Bark Thorwald	17 6
			21st..			Brig Theresa	
			21st..			Schooner Kate M. Hilton	
			22d..			Ship Ajax	18 0
			22d..			Bark Energie	15 6
			22d..			Brig Barclo	
			23d..	15½	3	Steamer Memphis grounded, drawing	18 2